



**AMERICAN CITIZENS SERVICES NEWSLETTER**  
**U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL HONG KONG**  
**February 2005**

Through the monthly American Citizens Services newsletter, the Consulate General provides security and other information of general interest to U.S. citizens in Hong Kong and Macau who have subscribed by registering with the American Citizens Services (ACS) Unit and providing an email address or fax number.

If you believe others would benefit from receiving this newsletter, please forward it to them and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe to receive our monthly newsletter and other updates, please register online by following this link <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs7.htm>. If you do not wish to receive this monthly newsletter, or would like to be removed from our email/fax list, please email us at [acshnk@yahoo.com](mailto:acshnk@yahoo.com) or follow the instructions at the bottom of this newsletter to unsubscribe.

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### **The American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit is Moving in March!**

The American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit will be trading spaces with the Immigrant Visa Unit, all on the same floor, in order to provide more windows and a larger waiting room for U.S. citizens. To facilitate this move, the ACS Unit will be closed to the public on March 4 (Friday) and 7 (Monday), 2005. U.S. citizens reporting the arrest, hospitalization, death or other emergency involving a U.S. citizen should contact ACS at 2841-2211, 2841-2225, or 2841-2323, from 8:30AM to 5:30PM. The after hours emergency number is 2841-2230. From March 8, we will resume our regular hours of service, Monday to Friday from 8:30AM to noon and 1:30PM to 4:00PM except for Wednesday afternoons and U.S. and local holidays. We appreciate our customers' understanding and patience as we undertake these renovations to enhance the level of service we provide.

### **Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (CRBAs) and Passports Return via Hongkong Post Courier Mandatory from April 15**

Effective April 15, 2005, in order to provide quicker delivery of processed CRBAs and passports, reduce the number of times that customers return to the Consulate, and better accommodate "summer rush" demand for consular services, we will cease in-person collection of CRBAs and passports and instead request that U.S. citizens use Hongkong Post Courier to receive these documents. This service is currently optional – for more information, please see <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/optionalcourierreturn.htm>.

Please note that because U.S. law generally prohibits possession of more than one valid U.S. passport any passports submitted for renewal or replacement will be cancelled and then usually returned to the applicant. The new passport normally is received from the U.S. within ten calendar days and often sooner. We therefore anticipate that with courier delivery our customers will receive their new passports within ten working days. U.S. citizens who cannot wait in Hong Kong or Macau for ten working days for their passport may wish to apply prior to April 15, 2005, or apply where they will be for the necessary processing time.

The Consulate urges all U.S. citizens who have applied for new U.S. passports or CRBAs to collect those documents as close to the estimated pickup date as possible. We have a large inventory of uncollected passports and some CRBAs awaiting collection. **Any passports or CRBAs not collected prior to April 15, 2005, may be cancelled and forwarded to the Department of State; those applicants will need to reapply, including paying new fees, if they wish to receive a new passport and will need to contact the Department of State for a new CRBA.**

### **Coming Soon – Apply to Renew Passports by Hongkong Post Courier**

Responding to customer feedback, we are planning to start receiving certain passport renewal applications by Hongkong Post Courier. Payment would be by credit card only. More information will be provided on the Web site and through this newsletter once we finalize the details of how this program will work. For details on which passports may be renewed now without the applicant's personal appearance, and would be renewable by mail once this program starts, please consult our Passport Renewals Without Personal Appearance information sheet at

<http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/pptrenewalswopa.htm>. Further information on receiving passports back by Hongkong Post is available at <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/optionalcourierreturn.htm>.

### **Coming Soon – Appointment System for Consular Reports of Birth Abroad (CRBAs) and Passports**

In order to better accommodate parents and children coming for passport services, particularly first-time passport applicants, we are working on an on-line appointment system and hope to have this in place prior to the “summer rush.” When this system is in place, we would receive applications by appointment only in the morning; those without appointments, including all notariats, would need to come in the afternoon when we are open to the public. To expedite processing of CRBA and minors’ passports, parents may wish to fax in ahead of time the required documents (please see our Web site for more details) then bring in the originals and the passport photographs when they present the application. This would allow the ACS staff to data enter information ahead of time.

### **Federal Income Tax Information**

The American Citizen Services (ACS) Unit has received a limited supply of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) forms for tax year 2004. Individuals can directly download all IRS tax forms and publications at <http://www.irs.gov>.

From March 8 to 15, an IRS Taxpayer Assistance Representative will be at the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong. More details on this visit will be announced when available from the IRS representative.

Consular officers may not offer tax advice. Persons with specific questions on Federal taxes should check the “Contact Us” link on the IRS Web site noted above.

The ACS Unit does not stock state income tax forms. State tax forms may be obtained from each state in the United States, or may be downloaded from the Federation of Tax Administrators at the following web site: <http://www.taxadmin.org/fta/forms.ssi>.

### **Special Primary Election March 8, 2005, for California Residents of the 5<sup>th</sup> District**

On Tuesday, March 8, 2005, there will be a special primary election in the California 5th Congressional District to fill the seat of Congressman Robert Matsui. All members of the U.S. Uniformed Services, their family members and citizens residing outside the U.S. who are California residents from the 5th District should request a ballot for this special primary election by completing and submitting an FPCA, SF-76, as soon as possible, if not done already in calendar year 2005. See Voting News Release #1 (January 18, 2005) at [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) for more details.

### **Federal Voting Assistance Program Updates**

The February 2005 Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) Voting Information News includes useful information on residence guidelines for overseas voters and change of address for voting purposes. For the full text, please go to [www.fvap.gov](http://www.fvap.gov) and click on “Voting Information News.”

### **Current Travel Information**

Since our last newsletter (January 2005), the Department of State has issued Travel Warnings and Public Announcements about travel to the following countries or areas:

Guyana 02/04/2005, Travel Warning  
Nepal, 02/02/2005, Public Announcement  
Ethiopia, 01/28/2005, Public Announcement  
Kuwait, 01/28/2005, Public Announcement  
Mexico, 01/26/2005, Public Announcement  
Iraq Elections, 01/26/2005, Public Announcement  
Algeria 01/19/2005, Travel Warning  
Guyana 01/19/2005, Travel Warning  
Indonesia 01/14/2005, Travel Warning  
Tajikistan, 01/14/2005, Public Announcement  
Indonesia 01/13/2005, Travel Warning  
Thailand, 01/12/2005, Public Announcement  
Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, 01/06/2005, Public Announcement.

In addition to these Travel Warnings and Public Announcements, the State Department issues [Consular Information Sheets](#) for every country of the world with information on such matters as the health conditions, crime, unusual currency or entry requirements, any areas of instability, and the location of the nearest embassy or consulate in the country. *The Department of State published an updated Consular Information Sheet for the Hong Kong SAR on October 22, 2004, the Macau SAR on November 12, 2004, and China on January 15, 2005.*

On February 1, 2005, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued updated Interim Guidance About Avian Influenza A (H5N1) for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad. This update is available on the Consulate's Web site at

[http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/avian/2005/avian\\_flu\\_ig\\_americans\\_abroad\\_2005.pdf](http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/avian/2005/avian_flu_ig_americans_abroad_2005.pdf)  
or [http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/travel\\_warnings.htm](http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/travel_warnings.htm).

The full texts of these and other current documents are available at the Department of State's Web site, <http://travel.state.gov>.

### **Internet-Based Registration System (IBRS)**

The State Department launched a new and much improved consular Web site, <http://travel.state.gov>. The Web site's appearance, usability and functionality have all been enhanced, and it has improved organization and navigational tools to help users find information more quickly and accurately.

An important new function is secure online travel registration, which will allow U.S. citizens (USCs) to record foreign trip and residence information that the Department of State can use to communicate with USCs and assist USCs in case of an emergency.

USCs around the world who travel or reside abroad can access this site either through a link on [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov), or directly, at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>. The Department of State invites USCs to register themselves and their families and get acquainted with travel registration. If USCs are already registered with this consulate, the Department asks that they please re-register on line to update their records.

The Internet travel registration service for USCs allows USCs to register and update their contact information on the Internet at any time, making it easier for USCs to keep their information current. The site also provides USCs with up-to-date travel information

customized to the USC's unique travel agenda and itinerary. The data USCs provide is secured behind Department of State firewalls, accessed only by cleared personnel in Embassies, Consulates, and the Department of State, and releasable only with the USC's permission under the provisions of the Privacy Act.

Please let the Department know how you like the IBRS site. If you encounter any difficulties or have any questions about this travel registration Web site, please send an e-mail to [caibrs@state.gov](mailto:caibrs@state.gov). If USCs have specific questions about their registration with this consulate please contact us by email: [acshnk@yahoo.com](mailto:acshnk@yahoo.com).

### **Notarize Parental Consent for Passport Services for Minors Under Age 14**

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Effective July 2, 2001, U.S. law requires both parents' consent to passport services applications for minors under 14. This consent is normally established by the parents signing the application in front of a U.S. Consular officer. In addition, the parents must prove their parentage and custodial status and grant their consent every time a U.S. citizen child under age 14 applies for passport services. Parentage status may be established by an original or certified copy of the child's birth certificate listing both parents' full names. Custodial status may be proven by an original or certified copy of a court order. When only one parent is available to execute the application, that parent must provide, under penalty of perjury, documentary evidence demonstrating that he or she has sole legal custody of the child or has the written consent of the other parent to the issuance of the passport. **Effective November 1, 2004, written consent must be notarized and provide unequivocal consent to passport issuance.** We can accept faxed copies of this consent statement, but the notary seal must be visible in the faxed copy. Exceptions to this requirement may be made in special family circumstances or exigent circumstances necessitating the immediate travel of the child. U.S. citizens under age 14 applying for passports must appear in person at American Citizen Services. This requirement does not apply to requests for adding visa pages or other amendments to current U.S. passports.

### **How to Avoid Delays in Receiving Passport Services**

First and foremost, please come early to the ACS Unit. We open at 8:30AM and close at noon Monday through Friday, reopening at 1:30PM until 4:00PM except Wednesday afternoons plus local and U.S. holidays when we are closed. Customers who come closer to our opening hours, when we tend to have fewer customers, will receive faster service. Customers who come closer to our closing hours may need to wait longer as we assist customers who arrived earlier. Monday mornings and the day after holidays are especially busy times for us so if you seek non-emergency services you may wish to consider coming at other times/days.

Second, to provide equitable services to all customers we use a ticketing machine to call customers to the window in order of when they took the ticket. The ticketing machine is located at the entrance to the ACS waiting room. Please take a ticket when you enter and again if you have been given a form for completion such as adding pages or applying for a new passport (most forms are available on line at our Web site, <http://.hongkong.usconsulate.gov>, and we encourage customers to complete the relevant forms prior to requesting consular services).

Third, we have recently received applications for visa pages additions, passport renewals, emergency passports and other passport services that have been incomplete and thus

delayed. We strongly advise U.S. citizens to plan travel in advance including any requirements or updates related to their travel documents. The most common reasons for delay:

- **Damaged Passports:** We cannot provide passport services such as adding visa pages to passports that are damaged. Traveling with a secure passport protects your personal security and protects U.S. national security. In addition, travelers using damaged passports may be detained, denied admission and/or otherwise inconvenienced when traveling abroad. Security features of a U.S. passport may be impacted by damage to the biographic/photograph page, deterioration to passport stitching due to multiple visa pages inserts etc. When a passport is damaged, a new passport application must be made. For more information, please see: <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/damagedpassports.htm>.
- **Incorrect Photos:** We are often presented with photos that are too small, too dark, have an improper background, have a border or otherwise do not comply with current passport photo standards. For more details on current passport photo requirements, please see: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/composition\\_checklist.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotos/composition_checklist.html).
- **Special Requirements For Minor Children:** Passport services for minor children under 14 years old have special requirements enacted by the United States Congress due to concerns regarding international child abduction. Requirements often missing at the time of application are the child's presence (if applying for passports), the child's birth certificate, a birth certificate that contains incorrect or incomplete information, the current passport of the parents/legal guardians, notarized consent letter from the non-applying parent, or court order that grants sole custody to the applying parent or court order specifically authorizing passport issuance to the minor regardless of custody. For current requirements, please see: <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/passports.htm>.

In summary, please keep your travel documents current and in good condition. Based on reasons including but limited to the above, we may not be able to provide services despite our wish to facilitate the travel of U.S. citizens. The information above describes the most common reasons for delay. For more information on passport processing and requirements, please see <http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/consular/acs/passports.htm>.

### **Hong Kong Arts Festival**

The Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Consulate General wishes to inform U.S. citizens residing in or visiting Hong Kong of the following:

The Hong Kong Arts Festival (HKAF) has kicked off in February and we are delighted that this year's event includes some excellent American performers in jazz, gospel and Latin music. Those interested in tickets should go to the HKAF Web site at: <http://www.hk.artsfestival.org/eng/homepage>

Listed below is a sampling of the American acts in this year's event:

*Brad Mehldau Trio (Jazz)*

Feb 22, Concert Hall, HK City Hall

\$320 \$260 \$200 \$150

Student \$130 \$100 \$75

*The Blind Boys of Alabama (Gospel)*

Mar 6, 7, Concert Hall, HK Cultural Centre



\$380 \$300 \$220 \$120  
Student \$150 \$110 \$60

*Regina Carter Quintet (Jazz)*

Mar 10, 11, Concert Hall, HK Cultural Centre  
\$450 \$350 \$250 \$150  
Student \$175 \$125 \$75

*Poncho Sanchez Latin Jazz Band*

Mar 17, 18, Concert Hall, HK Cultural Centre  
\$450 \$350 \$250 \$150  
Student \$175 \$125 \$75

**Foreign Service Written Examination: April 23, 2005**

The only administration of the Foreign Service Written Examination (FSWE) in 2005 will be on April 23, 2005. The FSWE will be offered in approximately 200 locations nationwide and at most of the locations where the U.S. has a diplomatic mission. For eligibility requirements and registration materials, please go to [www.careers.state.gov](http://www.careers.state.gov). Applications for the April 23 exam must be received by March 16, 2005 for foreign test sites, and March 23, 2005 for domestic test sites.

**Upcoming Holidays and Other Closures**

Please note that the Consulate will be closed on the following official holidays in 2005.

A - American Holiday, L - Local Holiday

February 9, 2005 (Wednesday)	Lunar New Year's Day	L
February 10, 2005 (Thursday)	Second Day of the Lunar New Year	L
February 11, 2005 (Friday)	Third Day of the Lunar New Year	L
February 21, 2005 (Monday)	President's Day	A
March 25, 2005 (Friday)	Good Friday	L
March 28, 2005 (Monday)	Easter Monday	L
April 5, 2005 (Tuesday)	Ching Ming Festival	L
May 2, 2005 (Monday)	Labor Day	L
May 30, 2005 (Monday)	Memorial Day	A
July 1, 2005 (Friday)	HKSAR Establishment Day	L
July 4, 2005 (Monday)	Independence Day	A
September 5, 2005 (Monday)	Labor Day	A
September 19, 2005 (Monday)	day following Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival	L
October 10, 2005 (Monday)	Columbus Day	A
October 11, 2005 (Tuesday)	Chung Yeung Festival	L
November 11, 2005 (Friday)	Veterans Day	A
November 24, 2005 (Thursday)	Thanksgiving Day	A
December 26, 2005 (Monday)	Christmas Day observed	A/L
December 27, 2005 (Tuesday)	Second Weekday after Christmas Day	L

**Other Internet Addresses of Interest to U.S. Citizens**

U.S. Federal Government: <http://www.firstgov.gov>  
U.S. Department of State, Consular Affairs: <http://travel.state.gov>  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov>

U.S. Federal Aviation Administration: <http://www.faa.gov>  
U.S. Internal Revenue Service: <http://www.irs.gov>  
Social Security Administration: <http://www.ssa.gov>; SSA Newsletter: [www.ssa.gov/enews/](http://www.ssa.gov/enews/)  
Federal Voting Assistance: <http://www.fvap.gov>  
U.S. Customs & Border Protection: <http://www.cbp.gov> (for information including importation of household pets, animal and plant health inspection, etc)  
U.S. Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov> (for information on food products, food safety and inspection service)  
Hong Kong Immigration Department: <http://www.info.gov.hk/immd>.

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